Uddhava Gītā

Lord Kṛṣṇa's Bhagavad-Gitā (BG) is very popular and often quoted. Yet another Gītā, called Uddhava Gītā (UG), preached by the same Lord later in His life is presented here and compared with BG.

Uddhava Gītā is in the eleventh skandha of Śrīmad-Bhāgavata purāṇa and spans over 1000 śloka-s, roughly 1.5 times the length of BG. After detailing Lord Kṛṣṇa's birth (janana), playful acts and rule of the kingdom (Dvārakādīśa's) in the tenth skandha, the eleventh skandha starts with the Lord's remaining two major tasks before He ascends to His abode - wiping out yadhu dynasty (die nasty!), and deliver UG. Kṛṣṇa leads yādhava-s to a sacred place and engages them in charities and austerities before the brāhmaṇa curse destroys the whole clan. Uddhava, Kṛṣṇa's cousin, confidant and close associate, arrives in that holy land.

Uddhava, knowing the Lord's intention to leave this bhūloka, pleads to take him along, wherever the Lord goes, because he cannot bear the separation from the Lord. Uddhava was cherished by the Lord Himself as the most important devotee in His mind - more than Śiva, Balarāma, Lakṣmī or His own soul (ātmā). Yet, Kṛṣṇa tells Uddhava that their paths are different and advises him to lead a useful and peaceful life, spreading the glories of the Lord on earth. UG is a noble saga that weaves through a unique friendship and love between two ideal personalities, yet manifesting as a great teaching from a great Acārya to a great śiṣya.

BG and UG are similar in many aspects. The basic philosophy and guidance on moral values are the same expounded by the same teacher, but the very purpose and the adopted approaches are different.

BG: was born at war field. The air is filled with animosity and avarice. Not an ideal location or audience for preaching.
UG: was born at a serene and sacred place. The air was filled with humility and reverence. It was told in solitude (ekānta) to a better and an ideal student.

BG: the disciple is Arjuna, a warrior prince, and the aim for him is to win the war and rule the country.
UG: the disciple is Uddhava, an ascetic, deep devotee of the Lord, who gave up the worldly pleasures and craved to stay with the Lord, eternally.

BG: describes the essence of Hinduism, yogic principles and Vedānta.
UG: is simply a farewell message, parting sermon, concentrating on the code of conduct for everyone.

BG: emphasizes the karma for a young warrior. The dharma for Arjuna is action.
UG: emphasizes renunciation (sanyāsa) for a mature and noble man. The dharma for him is dispassion and universal love.

BG: starts with the word "aśocyān", when Arjuna was confused and in despair.
UG: starts with sacrifice (parityajya) and explains how to give up everything and live rich.

BG: the Lord advised to kill the relatives, teachers and friends. Perform action.
UG: the Lord advised to give up the thoughts of relationships, friendships and take up penance. Practice peace and prayer.

BG: Arjuna and war (yuddha) was a simple excuse (vyāja) to preach.
UG: Uddhava and the dying dynasty (yadhu kula nāśa) was the excuse.

BG: Arjuna begged the Lord, "sādhi māṁ tvāṁ prapannam" – "I have surrendered to you. Please tell me what to do."
UG: Uddhava cries, "tvaṁ bhṛtya" – "I am your eternal servant", displaying the servitude with no independence (seśatva pāratantrya)

BG: Arjuna the student, after graduation, forgets his lessons.
UG: Uddhava the student, after graduation, spreads the lessons and implements.

BG: is a great handbook and nice reference to lecture, advice and quote.
UG: is a mind book. Its only purpose is to be implemented by readers.

BG: Arjuna wanted sainthood (sanyāsa), but Lord stopped him and said he is not ready.
UG: Kṛṣṇa gives sainthood (sanyāsa) to Uddhava, even as Uddhava says humbly that he is not qualified.

BG: is named after the great teacher.
UG: is named after even a greater student.

BG: The most important carama śloka is pushed to the end.
UG: picks up where He left off in BG and jumps on to the main theme in the opening śloka itself.

BG: emphasizes doing śaraṇāgati (total unconditional surrender)
UG: emphasizes how to act after śaraṇāgati.

sarva dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja ।
ahaṁ tvā sarva pāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ ।।

is the crown jewel śloka of BG (18-66). It says, “Having abandoned all the means (upāya-s) for the ultimate bliss (mokṣa), take refuge only in me. I will release you from all your sins and grant you the highest reward. Don’t despair”. This is Lord’s commandment to do prapatti (total unconditional surrender).

tvaṁ tu sarvaṁ parityajya snehaṁ sva-jana-bandhuṣu ।
mayyāveśya manaḥ saṁyak samadhṛg-vicarasva gām ।।

is the first śloka of advice in UG (Bhāgavata-Purāṇa, 11-7-6). “Give up all the attachments to worldly things and people, and fix your mind on me. Go around and live happy and treat everyone the same”. This is Lord’s prescription on post-prapatti living.

UG continues right where BG left off and advises what one should do after the prapatti process. An analogy would be - BG convinces about vacation and makes you to buy the air ticket while UG elaborates on how you behave in the boarding area in the airport, after checking in the bags, receiving the boarding pass and eagerly waiting to embark. Unlike BG, Lord does not wait till the end of teaching for the crucial advice. He jumps right in and advises the essence of Upaniṣad-s in the first seven śloka-s of His instruction (upadeśa). In summary, BG says “Do prapatti” and UG advises, “Don’t judge others.”

Hope this article will kindle some interest in UG to get to know and act on a peaceful and happy life for the rest of the days on earth, with flawless service to the Lord and to the society (bhagavat, bhāgavata kaiṁkarya).

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